



Public Safety Citizens Advisory Committee

FY 2005 - STATUS REPORT

I. Background

The Public Safety Citizens Advisory Committee is a twelve-member citizen body established by the City Council to provide input and advice to the Council and the City's public safety agencies about how the City can better meet the on-going needs and concerns of the residents, businesses and other organizations in the area public safety.

The committee is to take in hand those over arching, City wide public safety issues that affect the community as a whole. In particular, the objectives of the Public Safety Citizens Advisory Committee (PSCAC) are to:

- Act as a conduit between the Takoma Park residents, the Takoma Park Police Department, and the Council by soliciting and conveying information regarding community needs and expectations, long range visions and goals, and any problems and/or specific incidents that might arise In matters of public safety.
- Be an active participant in the continuous process of advising the Council and the Police Department regarding the designing and implementing of policies, plans and programs for Community Oriented Policing, Neighborhood Watch, and other neighborhood-based crime prevention activities.
- Design and implement procedures for carrying out the above objectives and in designing and implementing procedures, the Committee shall obtain any needed input and decisions from the Council, the Takoma Park Police Department, and other City agencies.
- Provide the Council, the Police Department, and other appropriate City agencies with suggestions about how public safety services might be funded.

In carrying out its objectives the Committee will:

- Consult periodically with the City Manager.
- Maintain an ongoing, active partnership with the Takoma Park Police Department (TPPD).
- Make a presentation to the Council at least once a year which will include discussions and descriptions of community needs and expectations in the

public safety area, activities being carried out to address these needs and expectations, and recommendations for further progress.

Major accomplishments of PSCAC over the past three years include:

- Development of a Community Oriented Policing definition and blue print (2002)
- Development of a Neighborhood Safety Contacts Program and conducted training (2002)
- Developed and distributed a "Neighborhood Safety Contacts Resource Manual" (2003)
- Recommended to the City Council the spin-off of the sub-committee "Safe Roadways" to become a committee of the Council which was approved (2003)
- Participated in the Takoma DC-Takoma Park, MD "Anti-Crime Task Force" (2002)
- Led the process to define Community Oriented Policing for the City of Takoma Park, MD
- Developed curriculum and format for the city-wide Community Oriented Policing Conference (2003)
- Conducted a comprehensive study of staffing needs for the Takoma Park Police Department (2003)
- Presented the findings of the staffing study of the Takoma Park Police Department before the City Council (2003)
- Participated in the review of the city's Emergency Preparedness Plan (2003)
- Conducted a Community Oriented Policing training needs assessment for the Takoma Park Police Department and conducted training for selected members of the department (2003)
- Recommended to the City Council the establishment of an Emergency Preparedness Committee which has been adopted (2005)
- Conducted strategic planning sessions (2004/2005)
- Participation in "National Night Out" (2002, 2003, 2004, 2005)
- Conducted Emergency Preparedness seminar (2005)
- Members of the PSCAC participated and are currently participating as representatives of the committee in a number of Council appointed committees such as Safe Roadways, Emergency Preparedness, Tax and Service Duplication Issues, Community Center Advisory Committee, and City Manager Selection Committee

In addition members of PSCAC participate, as representative of the committee, in various neighborhood initiatives such as establishing the New-CSAFE program and the joint OTBA-CUC initiative to provide emergency preparedness training to residents and TP business representatives.

Ideas for projects come to PSCAC from a variety of sources, including the public, City Council, community organizations, police department staff, and from committee members themselves. While there is no shortage of ideas for new projects, managing

workload while maintaining flexibility to address emerging issues and considering the time constraints on members of this volunteer committee is since most public safety issues are time and labor-intensive, a challenge. At the time, the committee has not refrained from confronting controversial or complex topics when they arise.

II. Potential Future Activities

The Public Safety Citizens Advisory Committee plans, beginning September 1, 2005, and ending September 1, 2006, to focus on four main projects:

- A. Data gathering to assist the City Council in determining the costs and benefits of maintaining a full-service police department, specifically as it relates to the 911 Communications and Detective functions;
- B. Review of recruitment strategies nationwide to provide recommendations for a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy for the Takoma Park Police Department;
- C. Continued assessment of community oriented policing in Takoma Park to determine its effectiveness, viability as a separate team in the department, cost, and whether it meets the needs of the community;
- D. Increasing the coordination between various neighborhood and business organizations and associations to better coordinate public safety, crime prevention and quality of life strategies and programs.

The following objectives/tasks will round out the plan and are on-going issues:

- E. Assist the police department in finding and securing funds if needed to upgrade the current "Records Management System if needed;"
- F. Continue to actively recruit members for the Public Safety Committee and Neighborhood Safety Contacts Program;
- G. Provide liaison to the Emergency Preparedness and Safe Roadways Committees.

PSCAC will, under the above listed areas of focus perform the following tasks.

- A. Data Gathering to Assist the City Council in determining the costs and benefits of maintaining a full-service police department, specifically as it relates to maintaining the 911 Communications and Detective functions.

The question of whether or not the city should fund and maintain a full-service police department has been an on-going discussion. Takoma Park is one of four municipalities in Montgomery County that maintains a municipal police department and the only to maintain a full-service municipal police force.

In the "Report of the Residents' Committee on Tax and Service Duplication Issues (TASDI): Key Findings and Recommendations – Police" (2005), the TASDI committee reported that "Under state law, the County reimburses the City based on the level of service the County *would provide* were it exclusively responsible for providing police service in Takoma Park" (p. 14). The committee recommended that since the County rebate represents "... only about half of what the City spends on police services ... because the County contends that it **would not, in the absence of a municipal force, provide the same level of protection and services that the City currently provides** ... " in addition to other areas listed in the report that the "... City investigate the option of transferring all or some of the duties for "911" communications and dispatch to the County..." (p. iii) and that the "... City investigate the option of transferring a portion of its criminal investigation responsibility to the County..." (p. iii).

As a result of the concern over the rebate and the costs of specifically maintaining the 911 Communications and Detective functions, the PSCAC will engage in a comprehensive data-gathering process that will provide information upon which the City Council can make an informed decision concerning these two functions. This will require recording in detail the activities, resources used, forms filled out etc. of the department members performing the duties/services in question.

The tentative schedule is to complete these tasks by March 2006

B. Review of recruitment strategies nationwide to provide recommendations for a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy for the Takoma Park Police Department.

Police departments nation-wide are experiencing chronic difficulty in attracting recruits and maintaining fully-staffed police departments. One of the reasons for this dearth of applicants is the fact that young people today have more options for gainful employment. And while many police departments have instituted a requirement of college credits to elevate the perceived quality of the applicants, this may, in fact have limited their ability to attract and retain recruits. Moreover, parents who have spent tens of thousands of dollars educating their children may be reluctant to see them go into what is viewed as a "blue collar occupation", shift work, bad days off, and the potential for death or injury. Further, the police have injured themselves with charges of racial profiling, corruption, and the inability to control crime – those messages are constantly in the media and in the minds of parents who want the best for their children.

Competition for qualified applicants is great; it is an "applicant's market" In general and more so in the Washington area. So why should a potential recruit choose one department over another? What are the factors that go into that decision making process and how can the Takoma Park Police Department compete with other local

police agencies that may seem to offer better benefits, and more excitement and the Federal agencies that are constantly hiring, offer perceived "thrill" and "prestige"?

There are lessons to be learned from the private sector that markets its products to younger and younger audiences, hoping that "brand loyalty" will translate into dollars as children age and spend their own money. Police Cadet and internship programs come to mind. Another lesson has to be learned from the military. A few years ago, advertisements were aimed at the individual "Be an Army of One," "The Brave, the Proud, the Marines," and "Be All You Can Be." Recently, advertisements have focused on the parents of potential recruits instead, recognizing that parents have major influence over their children's life choices.

The PSCAC will undertake a study to survey various recruiting methods and strategies that may create "brand loyalty" for potential candidates. The second and equally important part of this study will be to look at the types of benefits that assist in retaining those who have joined.

C. Continued assessment of community oriented policing in Takoma Park to determine its effectiveness, viability, cost, and whether it meets the needs of the community.

The City Council has approved a definition of community policing in Takoma Park, however, if one hundred residents were asked what it is and how they would recognize it, one hundred different responses would probably result. Gaining consensus on what community policing should do and those strategies that should be used to "implement" community policing has been an on-going problem. While just about every police chief, when queried, would say that his/her community has community policing, there would probably not be consensus in the community or recognition that "community policing" is being practiced.

Pick up the original documents for community policing and the authors wrote that community policing is "a journey," and that you never "arrive." While that might be true, residents facing crime and quality of life issues want something more concrete; they want to arrive somewhere, even if it is only partway "there", and they want the journey itself to provide improvements and as such, assurance that it will end with a safer community.

Using as a basis for the assessment and discussion PSCAC will use the publication "Community Policing Beyond Big Cities" (NIJ, 2004), and will assess where we are as a community with community policing and if the strategies in place are, in fact, making Takoma Park a better place to live and work.

- D. Increased coordination with various neighborhood and business organizations and associations to coordinate crime prevention and quality of life strategies and programs.

There is any number of community and business organizations and groups in Takoma Park and sometimes, due to lack of information sharing, there is duplication of effort or inefficient use of available resources. Meetings take place, for example, where public safety and police matters are the key agenda items yet the police are not invited/notified in time and thus the meeting participants are deprived of the contributions they, the police could make. The PSCAC will undertake to formulate a comprehensive plan to engage organizations and groups with a view toward providing a conduit or "clearing house" through which information and plans pertaining to public safety may be gathered and shared.

- E. Assist the police department in finding and securing funds to upgrade the current "Records Management System if needed.

Data are critical to crime analysis and when the data systems are antiquated, it is nearly impossible to forecast crime trends and patterns. The PSCAC will work with the TPPD to determine their information software and hardware needs engage individuals who are skills in grants writing to secure the necessary funding should it be needed. This effort may in fact be furthered by data collected in (A) above.

- F. Continue to actively recruit members for the Public Safety Committee and Neighborhood Safety Contacts Program.

The PSCAC is always looking for members for both the committee and the Neighborhood Safety Contacts Program. While there will be an active program to recruit members for the committee and the NSC using various media, the PSCAC will also invite persons who might not want to commit to membership to work on specific projects or tasks that are of interest. Engaging people in this manner might be attractive to those who may not be able or don't want to make a long-term committee, however, are interested in a specific aspect of the committee or NSC.

The Committee must find innovative ways to engage the interest of community members so that those who do serve on the committee do not become burned out.

- G. Provide liaison to the Emergency Preparedness and Safe Roadways Committees.

Emergency preparedness, pedestrian safety and burgeoning traffic are a continuing interests of the PSCAC and while these committees have become an entities in their own right, the PSCAC maintain a liaison with them and will participate in developing strategies and/or programs to be presented to the community.

III. Information Sharing

It is the intent of the Public Safety Committee to keep both the City Council and the community aware of its activities. To that end, the various news media in the community will be utilized (*Takoma Voice*, Cable TV) will be used to advise of its progress. Reports and other information will be placed on the City's website.

Meetings are held each month and the community is invited to attend and participate in the discussions.